

UTILITY APPLICATION

UNDER 37 CFR § 1.53(B)

TITLE: SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR REPLACEABLE LUGGAGE HANDLE

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S P E C I F I C A T I O N

SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR REPLACEABLE LUGGAGE HANDLE

BACKGROUND

1. Field of the Invention

[001] The field of the invention relates generally to a telescoping handle for transport devices and more particularly to facilitating easy removal and replacement of the telescoping handle when necessitated by damage.

2. Background Information

[002] A typical telescoping handle design for transport devices, such as wheeled luggage, often comprises two telescoping poles, one on either side of the transport device. Each telescoping poles often comprises two segments, an inner telescoping segment and an outer segment affixed to the transport device itself. The telescoping poles allow the user to extend the handle to a comfortable length while pulling the transport device. But the telescoping poles can also be collapsed to allow the handle to be retracted whenever it is convenient, e.g., when the transport device is stowed.

[003] Locking pins are often used to secure the extended position of the handle to prevent the handle from collapsing unexpectedly. Sometimes, the locking pins are spring-loaded bearings that require substantial axial force to collapse the telescoping pole. In other cases, the locking pins are mechanically coupled to an actuator on the handle, which does not disengage the lock unless the button is depressed. In other instances, a combination of an actuator and spring-loaded bearings can be used. In any event, the locking pins must be received by a hole in the opposite segment of the telescoping pole. Typically, the segments

are hollow tubes with their outer width or diameters decreasing in size so as to allow each successive segment to fit inside one another.

[004] The convenience of these telescoping handles notwithstanding, there currently exists a persistent problem of handle breakage owing to the high torsional and bending loads that are sometimes placed on the telescoping poles during use. Another frequent cause of failure can also be the actuator in the handle. It has been reported the 90% of warranty claims for wheeled luggage of this type is for replacement of broken telescoping handles.

[005] Owing to the difficulty and skill required, telescoping handle replacement is almost always performed by a specialized technician, which adds to the expense and inconvenience of repair for both the user and the supplier of the transport device. Alternatively, users just stop using the transport device, which adds to their expense and can detract from their satisfaction.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[006] A transport device comprises a replaceable telescoping handle. Replacement is achieved by including a release and retaining mechanism in a base to which the telescoping handle is installed.

[007] In one aspect, a user can obtain a replacement telescoping handle, release and remove a broken telescoping handle using the release and retaining mechanism, and then install the replacement telescoping handle.

[008] These and other features, aspects, and embodiments of the invention are described below in the section entitled "Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments."

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[009] Features, aspects, and embodiments of the inventions are described in conjunction with the attached drawings, in which:

[010] Figure 1 is a diagram illustrating a replacement telescoping handle assembly in accordance with one example embodiment;

[011] Figure 2 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary embodiment of a mounting base that is included in the assembly of figure 1;

[012] Figure 3 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary frame or hand truck incorporating a replacement telescoping handle assembly in accordance with one embodiment and

[013] Figure 4 is a flow chart illustrating an example method for replacing a broken telescoping handle in accordance with one embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[014] While the embodiments illustrated in the figures and described below are generally applicable to wheeled luggage implementations, it will be understood that the systems and methods described herein can be applied more generally to any type of transport device. For example, a hand truck can take advantage of the systems and methods described. Thus, the systems and methods described herein should not be seen as being limited to any particular type of transport device.

[015] Figure 1 is a diagram illustrating a replacement telescoping handle assembly 100 configured in accordance with one example embodiment of the systems and methods described herein. On the left hand side of figure 1, replaceable telescoping handle 110 is

shown mounted to a mounting base 107, which can for example, in turn be mounted to a transport device, such as a piece of wheeled luggage. Replaceable telescoping handle 110 comprise two telescoping poles 103 and 104, which can be configured as described above. In the embodiment illustrated in figure 1, replaceable telescoping handle 110 also comprise an actuator 112 in handle 102 configured to enable replaceable telescoping handle 110 to be extended upon actuation.

[016] Thus, when actuator 112 is actuated, locking pins 114 and 116 at the bottom of telescoping poles 103 and 104 are retracted, which allows an inner segment (not shown) of telescoping poles 103 and 104 to slide within the outer segments of telescoping poles 103 and 104, allowing telescoping handle 110 to be fully extended. Telescoping poles 103 and 104 can be prevented from disengaging mounting block 107, however, by release and retaining mechanisms 105 and 106. As long as release and retaining mechanisms 105 and 106 are installed, then telescoping handle 110 will not disengage from mounting block 107 when it is being extended.

[017] The failure point in transport device that incorporate telescoping handles, such as telescoping handle 110, is often the telescoping handle itself. For example, failure can occur in telescoping handles 103 and 104, where the bending or torsional forces can occasionally momentarily exceed the failure limit of telescoping handles 103 and 104 leading to localized buckling and collapse, or other problems. Additionally, actuator 102 can fail due to excessive use, or stress. When catastrophic breakage of telescoping handle 110 occurs, the usefulness of the associated transport device is substantially lost. Unfortunately, conventional replacement is costly, inconvenient, or both, because conventional telescoping handle assemblies are not designed for easy replacement.

[018] As can be seen on the right hand side of figure 1, however, when release and retaining mechanisms 105 and 106 are removed, then telescoping handle 110 is free to be disengaged from mounting base 107. Accordingly, if telescoping handle 110 is damaged, release and retaining mechanisms 105 and 106 can be removed and telescoping handle 110 can then be removed and replaced with a new handle. Release and retaining mechanisms 105 and 106 can then be re-installed and the life of the associated transport device can be extended without the cost or inconvenience of taking the transport device to a service center for repair.

[019] In the embodiment of figure 1, release and retaining mechanisms 105 and 106 each comprise a retaining clip that is installed and removed using a screw on either side of the retaining clip as described in more detail in relation to figure 2. It should be understood, however, that release and retaining mechanisms 105 and 106 can comprise any type of clip, fastening device, etc., that can effectively be used to prevent telescoping handle 110 from disengaging unless the release and relating mechanisms are themselves removed or otherwise disengaged from mounting block 107. Moreover, release and retaining mechanism 105 and 106 can comprise a plurality of devices that operate in unison to release and retain telescoping handle 110, such as in the embodiment of figure 1, where the retaining clips and sets of screws are required to perform both the release and retaining functions. Further, in certain embodiments only a single release and retaining mechanism can be used, i.e., instead of two release and retaining mechanisms 105 and 106.

[020] Figure 2 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary embodiment of mounting base 107 in accordance with on embodiment of the system and methods described herein. Also illustrated in figure 2 are the lower portions of telescoping poles 103 and 104. As can be seen in figure 1, telescoping poles 103 and 104 can comprise retaining sleeves 120 and 121. When

installed in mounting base 107, retaining sleeves 120 and 121 can reside under collars 108-111. Retaining sleeves 120 and 121 can be configured to slide over the ends of telescoping poles 103 and 104, and with exterior dimensions to fit snuggly within the corresponding collars 108-111. Retaining sleeves 120 and 121 can be further provided with annular grooves so that, when fully inserted, the grooves align with gaps between collars 108 and 109 and 110 and 111 respectively, thus enabling retention by retaining clips 105 and 106. End caps 122 and 124 prevent retaining sleeves 120 and 121 from sliding past the ends of poles 103 and 104 and, hence, block removal of the retractable handle when secured with retaining clips 105 and 106. Upon removal of retaining clips 105 and 106, however, telescoping handle 110 can be removed from mounting base 107.

[021] Retaining clips 105 and 106 can be secured using screws, as described, installed on either side of retaining clips 105 and 106 at location 126 and 128. Of course, in other embodiments, a single screw can be used to install each of retaining clips 105 and 106. Alternative fastening mechanisms can also be used, such as clips, bolts, etc.

[022] In certain embodiments, the screws, or other fastening mechanism used, as well as clips 105 and 106, depending on the embodiment, can be made to stand out so that they are easy to locate. This can be important since replaceable telescoping handle 110 is suited for replacement by the user. An ordinary user may not, however, easily recognize what screws need to be removed in order to replace telescoping handle 110. Thus, making the screws, or other fastening mechanisms stand out can increase the ease with which telescoping handle 110 can be replaced by making them easy to locate. In one embodiment, for example, the screw heads are painted red so that they can be easily spotted. But any color paint, can be used as long as it causes the fastening mechanism to stand out.

[023] The collars 108-111 and 120-121 and retaining clips 105 and 106 can be constructed of a suitable plastic or polymer material such as, for example Nylon or Delrin, that combine the desirable qualities of high strength and toughness together with low friction and low galling propensity.

[024] Figure 3 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary transport device 302, such as a frame or hand truck, incorporating a replacement telescoping handle assembly 100 in accordance with one embodiment of the systems and methods described herein. The assembled device 302 can be operated as shown for transporting heavy objects, or can additionally incorporate a soft or hard sided suitcase, thereby transforming it into a wheeled luggage embodiment. The particular embodiment shown in figure 3 can be robustly designed, for example, making it suitable for transporting loads greatly exceeding a weight that could be comfortably lifted by the typical user. The stress bearing components can be made of strong and light weight materials such as aluminum alloys or composites, particularly telescoping poles 103 and 104, where momentarily high stresses occasionally occur during use. For example, in one implementation, metal alloy tubing can be used for the telescoping pole construction, as is well known, to maximize bending and torsional strength while minimizing weight.

[025] Figure 4 is a flow chart illustrating an example method for replacing a broken telescoping handle with a replaceable telescoping handle 110 in accordance with one embodiment of the systems and methods described herein. Once a telescoping handle breaks, the user must first obtain a replaceable telescoping handle in step 402. For example, the user can obtain a new telescoping handle from the manufacturer or from a third party supplier. Then, in step 404, the user can remove, or otherwise disengage the associated release and

retaining mechanism, or mechanisms. For example, the user can locate retaining clips 105 and 106 and the associated screws. As mentioned above, this can be made easier for the user of the screws, or clips are made to stand out, e.g., with red paint or markings.

[026] In step 406, the broken telescoping handle can be removed, once the release and retaining mechanism(s) are disengaged. In step 408, the replacement telescoping handle obtained in step 402 can then be installed and the release and retaining mechanism(s) can be reinstalled in step 410. At this point, the associated transport device should be ready for use.

[027] While certain embodiments of the inventions have been described above, it will be understood that the embodiments described are by way of example only. Accordingly, the inventions should not be limited based on the described embodiments. Rather, the scope of the inventions described herein should only be limited in light of the claims that follow when taken in conjunction with the above description and accompanying drawings.